



# Love Our Lakes

## Gippsland Lakes



## Taking the long view

**THE law tells Ron Paynter that effluent isn't allowed to leave his farm, but common-sense and a sense of community would make sure of it anyway.**

Farming in the hill country of Ellinbank, just south of Warragul, Ron knows that every drop of liquid waste that enters the waterways on his property could potentially end up hundreds of kilometres away in the Gippsland Lakes.

"Even though we are on a dry-land farm, we understand that we are at the top of the catchment for the Gippsland Lakes," he said.

"It's recognising that your farm has boundaries, but your activities don't. What happens here on the farm does have an impact on the rest of the environment."

Where that impact is most obvious is at the dairy shed, where 350 cows gather twice a day for milking.

“ The plants really respond to it ... you end up with lovely, dark green, vigorously growing strips of grass...”

As they crowd towards the shed waiting for their turn in the dairy, the cows produce large amounts of manure and urine that, left untreated, would wash into the nearest waterway with the next shower of rain.

For Ron, the idea of effluent washing into waterways wasn't just an environmental problem, it was a waste of a valuable resource that could be used elsewhere on the farm.

To solve the problem, a large area around the dairy was concreted, meaning the animal

waste now ends up in a pit that is linked to the larger effluent pond nearby.

It can then be pumped back around the farm as liquid fertiliser to help produce nutritious pasture for his Holstein herd.

"The effluent itself is really quite valuable to us. The paddocks we are standing on here hold up much better into the summer than the paddocks that haven't had effluent on it," Ron said.

"As well as putting water on, we are giving a lovely dose of fertiliser with phosphorous, potassium and nitrogen."

"The plants really respond to it ... you end up with lovely, dark green, vigorously growing strips of grass."

It's a win-win for the environment and the farm business, but for Ron, the responsibility of being a good custodian of the land is always at the forefront of his mind.

"It's just part of being a good corporate citizen and a good dairy farmer to make sure you manage your waste stream," he said.

# Making the Connection

**WHEN Ron Paynter throws a line into the Gippsland Lakes, he wants to know that he hasn't done anything to harm the world-renowned aquatic ecosystem.**

With decades of memories from holidays around the Lakes, Ron has an emotional connection that makes his geographic link all the more important.

Little Moe River and Bear Creek run through his family's Ellinbank dairy farm, meandering through the hill country, into Lake Narracan and eventually hundreds of kilometres away to the mighty Lake Wellington, east of Sale.

While Ron is just one of hundreds of farmers on hundreds of rivers, creeks and streams that feed into the Lakes, he knows that what happens on his property will impact on the Lakes system.

"My family has a long connection with the Gippsland Lakes and I have very fond memories of many years of summer holidays down there," he said.



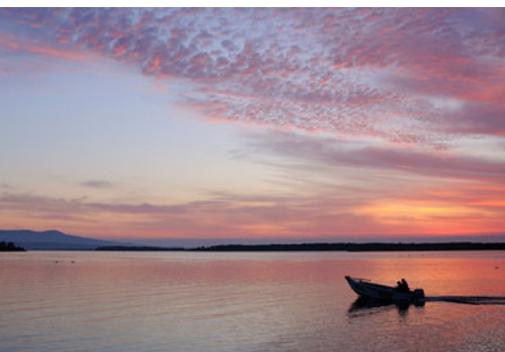
"Knowing that we are tied by the waterways to the Gippsland Lakes is an important thing that makes me want to look after them."

Closer to home, the improved waste management regime of dairy farms in the area is having an impact on local waterways and wildlife.

"We have a creek that runs around behind us, and there have been sightings of platypus in there, as well as other wildlife," Ron said.

"For that reason alone it is important we protect the quality of water going into it.

"Making sure the water that does run off our place is as clean as it can be is really important to us," he said



## Helping to help the lakes

### **LOOKING after the Gippsland Lakes Catchment is a team effort.**

While farmers do their best to minimise nutrient run-off from their properties, a multi-agency approach to funding assistance and information sharing has helped individual farmers turn their good intentions and hard work into effective management practices.

A good example is the Core 4 project that helped farmers reduce nutrient loss into waterways by assisting with funding for projects that will have positive outcomes for Gippsland Lakes water quality.

For Ron Paynter, it meant a helping hand in building an effluent pit at the lowest end of his dairy shed run off area.

While he had managed to control the bulk of manure and urine leaving the area, the concrete pit has streamlined operations and ensured that nothing washes from the dairy into the waterways nearby.

When he built the dairy shed 15 years ago, there was little money left over to finish concreting work around the shed.

As it became a boggy mess in winter, Ron was unable to contain effluent flow during heavy rain events, leading him to seek help in closing

the waste loop around the milking area.

"As a result of getting some Core 4 funding to help mitigate against nutrient loss, we were able to build this structure to connect the dairy yard to the effluent pit."

Core 4, a Federal Government funded program managed by West Gippsland CMA, is just one of many initiatives that are helping Dairy farmers improve their environmental outcomes and help keep the Gippsland Lakes clean and healthy.

"Initiatives like Core 4 and the riparian health program have got us thinking about environmental health and the consequences of our farming actions," he said.